

A Campaign for Freedom:  
Cultivating Democracy in the 21st Century



REPORT OF THE  
**WESTMINSTER 2.0**  
WORKING GROUP



June 2022

RONALD  REAGAN  
INSTITUTE

“No, democracy is not a **fragile flower**. Still it *needs cultivating*. If the rest of the century is the witness the gradual growth of *freedom and democratic ideals*, we must **take actions** to *assist the campaign for democracy*.”



“The objective I propose is quite **simple** to state: to foster ***the infrastructure of democracy***, the system of a *free press, unions, political parties, universities*, which allows a people to **choose** their own way to **develop** their own culture, to **reconcile** their own differences through ***peaceful means***.”

President Ronald Reagan, June 8, 1982,  
Address to Members of the British Parliament at Westminster

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This report is dedicated to two late Secretaries of State who honorably served their country and advanced the cause of freedom in the world, the Honorable Madeleine Albright and the Honorable George Shultz.



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## A CAMPAIGN FOR FREEDOM: CULTIVATING DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY WESTMINSTER 2.0 WORKING GROUP REPORT

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Working Group Co-Chairs and Members</b>  | 5  |
| <b>Working Group Staff and Briefers</b>   | 6  |
| <b>The Setting of President Reagan’s Westminster Address</b>  | 7  |
| <b>Preamble: A Presidential Westminster 2.0 Speech</b>  | 8  |
| <b>Introduction</b>   | 12 |
| <b>Democracy at Home</b>  | 15 |
| <b>Analyzing the Current Situation</b>  | 16 |
| Understanding the Global Authoritarian Threat   | 16 |
| Evaluating Existing Efforts   | 19 |
| <i>Civil Society</i>  | 19 |
| <i>U.S. Government</i>  | 20 |
| <i>Private Sector</i>   | 21 |
| <i>International Architecture</i>   | 22 |
| <b>Modernizing the Toolkit</b>  | 22 |
| Leveraging New Technologies to Advance Freedom  | 22 |
| <i>Recommendation 1: Develop targeted technology tools</i>  | 24 |
| Delivering Resources to Independent Voices and Civil Society  | 24 |
| Activists in Repressive Societies   |    |
| <i>Recommendation 2: Launch an International Platform for Freedom</i>   | 25 |
| Strengthening Synergies Between Combating Corruption and Democratization Efforts  | 25 |
| <i>Recommendation 3: Underscore connection between anti-corruption and democratization efforts</i>                                    | 26 |
| Invigorating Independent Media and Journalism   | 26 |
| <i>Recommendation 4: Inject additional resources and create a new grant-making entity to support independent media and journalism</i> | 27 |
| Empowering International Cooperation  | 28 |
| <i>Recommendation 5: Build flexible coalitions around specific pillars of free societies</i>  | 28 |
| Recommitting to Core Principles   | 29 |
| <b>Conclusion</b>   | 30 |
| <b>Endnotes</b>   | 31 |

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*This report was prepared over the course of a two-year study and includes input from a diverse set of Working Group members and briefers. Opinions and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of each of these individuals or their organizations.*



## *The Setting of President Reagan's Westminster Address*

Stepping to the podium, Reagan felt history's weight from the surrounding statues and paintings displaying great moments in the English past. Now before him sat a legion of British leaders, polite but skeptical. As the venerable actor steps to the stage, the crowd in the Royal Gallery turns expectantly toward their guest.

Ronald Reagan knows the script well, for he wrote much of it himself. As he speaks, his words begin to echo not just through the hall but into the coming decades. Beginning with a tribute to democracy's English roots, he traced its present progress. "Democracy is proving itself to be a not-at-all-fragile flower. From Stettin on the Baltic to Varna on the Black Sea, the regimes planted by totalitarianism have had more than 30 years to establish their legitimacy. But none—not one regime—has yet been able to risk free elections. Regimes planted by bayonets do not take root." He denounces totalitarianism's "barbarous assault on the human spirit" and the Berlin Wall as "that dreadful gray gash across the city." He heralds the "democratic revolution" gathering across the globe and calls for a "crusade for freedom" to accelerate it. To those with ears to hear, he distills what the next six and a half years of his foreign policy will entail. The moral and ideological bankruptcy of communism, and the exhaustion of the decrepit Soviet economy. The promotion of political, religious, and economic liberty around the world as a better way than communism. The arc of history guiding the present moment. And the triumph of freedom and peace.

He concludes with a prophecy, and a way to hasten it: "What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term—the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history." To Reagan's multiple audiences in London, on the Continent, behind the Iron Curtain, in Moscow, in the developing world, and at home in the United States, the import of the speech will become known only with the passage of years. His Westminster oration unveils a new offensive that in seven short years will bring the Cold War to a victorious, peaceful end.

Excerpted from: William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink* (Dutton: New York, forthcoming)

## PREAMBLE: A PRESIDENTIAL WESTMINSTER 2.0 SPEECH

**Modelled after President Reagan’s 1982 address, this preamble offers the Working Group’s idea for a future presidential speech on developing a Westminster approach for the 21st century**

*Forty years ago, the American President stood in one of democracy’s shrines, Britain’s Palace of Westminster, and proposed a simple but profound objective: “to foster the infrastructure of democracy” around the world.*

*In the forty years since President Ronald Reagan’s address, often called his Westminster Speech, America and other democratic nations have led that campaign through the programs launched by his call to action. Championed by Republicans and Democrats alike, it has been a campaign to free those living under tyranny and to ensure those living in the bright light of freedom do not fall back under an authoritarian shadow.*

*The campaign was waged not with weapons or by warriors, but through ideas and by institutions. Ideas have always been democracy’s most powerful force, most importantly the idea that all are created equal—and that government exists to protect their inalienable rights.*

*To execute this campaign—and advance the cause of freedom—President Reagan called for new organizations to support this work. This led to the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy, its associated organizations, and countless non-governmental organizations.*

*In later years, government agencies, like the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development, adapted their missions and delivered targeted grants. Private sector companies launched their own initiatives. An international ecosystem of democracy organizations also emerged to support this work.*

*All of these entities advanced a shared goal—to advance freedom and make democracy more durable around the world.*

*What followed? Democracy was ascendant. The Iron Curtain lifted. The Berlin Wall fell. On the graves of tyrants in Africa and Asia and the Americas, rose new republics, at times watered by the blood of patriots and freedom fighters. The heroes of each success were the activists, dissidents, and everyday citizens who stood up in the name of their own freedom.*

*Today, though, is democracy still on the rise, or is authoritarianism resurgent?*

*The rubble in Bucha and Mariupol, the detention camps of Xinjiang, the savage violence of the Syrian regime, the crackdown in Hong Kong: in these we find a stark warning—and chilling answer. We are still waging the battle. Dictators around the world seek to thwart the democratic aspirations of their citizens. Authoritarianism is neither contained, nor humbled.*

*Indeed, dictators have adapted to a new century, harnessed new technologies, exploited old grievances, and set their sights far beyond their own borders.*

*The United States of America remains a great beacon for freedom, a city upon a hill, but even*



*here there have been attempts to overthrow or undermine our own institutions of democracy.*

*The world has transformed. And while the infrastructure of America's democracy promotion organizations has continually evolved, we have not adapted apace with the schemes of today's autocrats and dictators or to save backsliding democracies. And so, a "democracy stimulus" is now required to respond to growing and more formidable challenges. The task ahead is to modernize and fortify our approaches and efforts.*

*But first, let us remember why.*

*We are guided by a conviction that democracy, though imperfect, remains the best form of government because it affirms human dignity and allows for human flourishing.*

*Fostering freedom around the world also serves our nation's interests, as our geopolitical competitors seek to undermine the political and economic system that provides for American security and prosperity.*

*In other words, our values are our interests.*

*You see, tyrants understand that the very idea of democracy threatens their position of power. To keep power, they must control the flow of information; and if they can't control that, they will control the behavior of their citizens—to ensure they do not act on the powerful democratic idea.*



*They collude with each other to share their repressive techniques. The Chinese government has even led training programs, sharing tools to control public opinion, mass surveillance tactics, internet control measures, and censoring methods. And Russia and China have become partners, bolstering each other's authoritarian ambitions, while they create a new network of client states.*

*Why do they do this? For one, authoritarians feel threatened by democracies' existence. Not because we seek violence. We do not. But because as long as the idea of democracy exists, their survival is threatened. And for that reason, authoritarianism is a threat to America and to free people everywhere—because in their obsessive drive for self-preservation, they seek to undermine democracy anywhere, to remake the world in their image.*

*These regimes are not constrained by their own borders. China bars its own citizens from accessing information and news with its Great Firewall and uses Confucius Institutes and influence campaigns to burnish its image abroad. Even as Moscow erects a digital Iron Curtain to keep ideas out of Russia, its teams of hackers and digital spies and malevolent actors sow disinformation and discord around the world. Russia exploits the digital freedom we enjoy, injecting anti-American, anti-democratic ideas that breed distrust and turn us against one another.*

*They know, as our founders did, that united we stand, divided we fall. And they want us to fall.*

*Unity, unity in our shared belief in democracy—that is the strength and shield of freedom loving people. Nowhere is that more apparent today than in Ukraine, which has been ruthlessly bombarded by a dictator’s regime simply because its citizens have chosen a democratic path. We call on democracies around the world to stand united with Ukraine, not to stand on the sidelines as the Ukrainian people fight for their freedom and their country’s sovereignty.*

*And while that dictator, in his hubris, believed a victory would be his in a matter of days, the Ukrainians, ordinary Ukrainians accomplishing extraordinary feats, have held their attackers at bay, handing them crushing defeats in battle. Putin mistook democracy and diversity as vulnerabilities. Ukraine shows that these ideals are sources of strength.*

*Even in their victories, the Ukrainians suffer greatly. More than four million have been forced from their homes. It is estimated that one Ukrainian child becomes a refugee every second of the day.*

*The Ukrainians, unlike the Russian conscripts and mercenaries, have a compelling reason to fight. They fight for their sovereignty, along with their freedoms. Their adversaries fight from a place of fear and for the lies they have been fed.*

*So let the free world stand shoulder to shoulder and say: we stand with Ukraine. Because if the Russian dictator has his way, his armies will advance beyond Ukraine—until he reclaims the lands that he perversely believes belong to him.*

*Yes, if Vladimir Putin were to achieve his goals, a new Iron Curtain would fall, sweeping under it everything “from Stettin on the Baltic to Varna on the Black Sea.” He is a vivid reminder that autocrats who oppress their own citizens have few restraints in acting with aggression against those beyond their borders.*

*We will not let the European continent be so divided again. And we cannot tolerate totalitarianism’s march, there or anywhere.*

*Ukraine is at war—a noble war. But war should not be the means by which we protect democracy in the world.*

*Which brings us back to Westminster and President Reagan’s charge. The time has come to modernize our toolkit to advance freedom in the context of the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. And what must that include?*

*America must find ways to make technology work for democracy activists seeking to wrestle power from dictators. We must deliver support to embattled independent voices in closed countries, especially civil society activists and journalists. And we must provide activists fighting repression and corruption with more tools to expose corruption and show that democracy is a bulwark against the abuse of political power for illicit gains.*

*New technologies can also be used in emerging democracies to advance efforts by elected leaders and citizens to promote government transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.*

*This battle will require us to work closely with our democratic partners and advance more effective and robust international cooperation. We must also remain committed and even double down on approaches that have been successful in the past and that reflect American values.*

*We must ensure that our democracy promotion efforts foster citizen-centered governance and protect the rights of marginalized and persecuted groups.*

*Our national leaders must also demonstrate their personal commitment to the cause of freedom by meeting with democracy activists—hearing about and then championing their heroic efforts.*

*U.S. presidents, senior officials, and members of Congress can signal our country's support for democracy by meeting with dissidents and activists from Russia, Hong Kong, Venezuela, Syria, Egypt, Belarus, North Korea, and China, or anywhere persecution and repression exist. These seemingly modest but visible acts of solidarity send a powerful message to autocratic regimes and bolster the morale of dissidents who so often feel isolated and embattled.*

*So here is my pledge: The United States will answer this call, take up this charge, and deploy new strategies to revitalize the campaign for democracy in this third decade of the 21st century.*

*I spoke earlier of President Reagan's Westminster Speech. I will close today by recalling two other addresses which could be called Westminster Speeches.*

*The first occurred in 1946, when Winston Churchill, who had been and would again be British prime minister, spoke at Westminister College in Missouri, alongside President Truman.*

*He presciently warned of the consequences of the recently descended Iron Curtain and Soviet aspirations in Germany. He warned that if democracies “become divided or falter in their duty and if these all-important years are allowed to slip away then indeed catastrophe may overwhelm us all.”*

*Churchill's warning resonates still today. And it echoes in another speech by one of the bravest modern defenders of freedom in the world—Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, when he spoke, by video feed, to the British Parliament in Westminster earlier this year.*

*As he did in his address to the U.S. Congress and other legislatures, he painted a powerful picture of Ukrainians' bravery through suffering, of their defense of democracy, “despite having to fight one of the biggest armies in the world.”*

*He explained that “we're looking for your help, for the help of the civilized countries.”*

*Oppressed people the world over are looking for, and need, our help. Whether they are fighting in a bloody war or engaged in a silent struggle, our obligation as a powerful and successful—if imperfect—democracy is to aid them and to help them build their own future.*

*For once again, our values are our interests. This is what is right—for their sake, and for ours.*

*And as we embark again on this mission, on this campaign for democracy, let us never grow weary or complacent. That is what the authoritarians are counting on. So just as President Zelenskyy borrowed the words of Churchill, I too borrow them now: We shall never give up. We shall never surrender.*

*May God bless America, and may God bless all who strive to live in peace and freedom.*

# INTRODUCTION

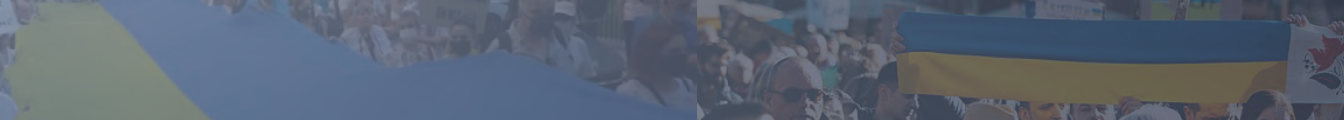
When President Reagan delivered his landmark speech before the British Parliament at Westminster in 1982, he called on the United States and the free world to take action to assist “the campaign for democracy.” He also laid out how to do so, proposing building an initiative that would “foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, [and] political parties.” Since that speech, we have made progress. The Iron Curtain fell. The world has witnessed democracy’s so-called third wave—“the gradual growth of freedom and democratic ideals”—with vibrant new democracies emerging in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa since 1982.

This progress is due in large measure to the demand by citizens around the world for freedom, human dignity, and more open societies along with efforts by civic activists, political leaders, government reformers, and journalists. Those fighting for freedom benefited from the solidarity and support of the campaign for democracy’s infrastructure. The government-commissioned “Democracy Program” eventually led to congressional authorization of the non-governmental but government-funded National Endowment for Democracy and its affiliated organizations. Congressman Dante Fascell, the then-Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, spearheaded these legislative efforts, building on ideas he had advanced for years.

This new infrastructure was charged with implementing President Reagan’s and Congressman Fascell’s vision of advancing the universal value of freedom and promoting democracy as the form of government best equipped to secure liberty and advance human development. That infrastructure is a concrete expression of America’s bipartisan commitment to advance those values. Yet in the face of ongoing challenges to the mission of expanding freedom and democracy and as dictators sharpen their tools of domestic and transnational repression, America’s institutions must continue to adapt.

Today, our nation and the free world face some challenges similar to those faced during the Cold War. Autocrats rule competitor nations with iron fists. Beyond their borders, these dictators and their regimes seek to reshape the world in their authoritarian image—undermining the free and open system that has for decades provided the foundation for the way nations interact. The Cold War presented a threat to our values as well as our nation’s survival and security. Likewise, today, in this interconnected and interdependent world, the peril of repression is not contained by borders. During the Cold War, President Reagan understood that one of his most potent aspects of our national power was our military might. Defending freedom still requires sufficient military strength to deter aggression and maintain peace—“peace through strength.” Yet, our commitment to democracy is not about geopolitics—it is about universal values and the human hunger for freedom.

The 21st century has also presented new challenges. Through authoritarian learning, dictators have coopted and exported a number of repressive technological tools to more effectively maintain their stranglehold on power. Corruption offers new sources of support for authoritarian rulers intent on enriching themselves and their cronies rather than serving their citizens. Journalism is under renewed threat from those who fear transparency and know truth will lead only to discontent. Autocrats also seek to bend for their own purposes freedom of speech to launch disinformation campaigns and foment division. Backsliding among nascent or fragile democracies has closed political openings and reversed progress toward freedom.



It is important to recognize that modern authoritarians are more likely to adopt the trappings and language of democracy as they consolidate power. They try to create a democratic façade, in a tacit admission that people worldwide desire democracy and that an appearance of democracy provides legitimacy and protection. They run sham elections, enact their policies through legislatures under their near-total control, and talk about freedom even as they curtail it. This reveals, in part, the paradox of tyrants: while they use aggression to project strength, they harbor insecurities and weakness. They fear their own people.

The past decade and a half has seen a decline in political rights, civil liberties, and global freedom. In order to continue realizing President Reagan's vision in today's world, the United States must return to his ambitious charge. Today, we have the benefit of the decades of experience in implementing programs and forging and developing relationships to expand freedom and democracy. Our nation must now bolster and reinvigorate these efforts with a 21st century democracy stimulus.

The strategies offered in this report reflect universal values and serve American interests. They are grounded in a conviction that democracy remains the best form of government because it affirms human dignity and advances human development. Fostering freedom around the world also serves our nation's interests, as the geopolitical competitors we face seek to undermine the free and open political and economic system that secures American security and prosperity. What happens in Wuhan or Aleppo or Crimea does not stay there. Hotspots most likely to erupt in violence are found, for the most part, in areas of the world that are non-democratic. These are places that experience military aggression across borders, ethnic conflict, and civil war; they create safe harbors for terrorists, permit illicit drug production, cover up emerging pandemics, and trigger refugee flows. The instability caused by human displacement and climate change demonstrates that democratic governments are better able to secure prosperity and peace.

Authoritarianism today threatens not just those living under its specter. It reaches outside its borders to challenge American interests and those of the free world. Beyond Putin's poisoning and jailing of political opponents and China's crackdown in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, Russia and China increasingly act as revanchist, imperialist powers. Russia's illegal and brutal aggression in Ukraine and China's global campaign to extend its malign influence demonstrate their ambitions. China seeks to claim disputed regional territorial waters and build artificial islands, demonstrating that it will not be constrained by international norms or the interests of other nations. Domestic repression and foreign aggression go hand in hand.

Democracy best protects our security and interests as well as global peace, but it can never be imposed. The war against Ukraine is a stark reminder that America's military strength is, under extraordinary circumstances, necessary to deter aggression, and to defend state sovereignty and democratic freedoms. A strong and well-equipped U.S. military can deter foreign aggression and adventurism; weakness—or perceived weakness—invites it.

It is for all of these reasons that our Working Group took up the charge of reimagining President Reagan's "Westminster approach" for the 21st century and developing a modernized "Westminster 2.0" vision and strategy. Over the past two years, the Reagan Institute convened a bipartisan group of current and former government officials, democracy experts and activists, and leaders from technology and business to answer the question of what President Reagan might say in a Westminster address for today's world. The preamble to this document answers the question in the form of a presidential speech. The report that follows outlines our more detailed findings and offers a set of recommendations.

This report focuses heavily on the authoritarian behavior of the Russian and Chinese regimes. The emphasis, however, is not about geopolitical competition—but the universal value of freedom. We focus on these authoritarian states not only because of their hostile actions against their own people but because of their outsized role in fomenting and promoting transnational efforts to subvert democracies and bolster autocrats. These regimes demonstrate vividly that governments that repress their own citizens are more likely to act aggressively, and without restraint, against those beyond their borders. In no way is this focus on two bad actors meant to condone or excuse the domestic repression in other countries around the world.

### *What is Democracy?*

Democracy is a political system that rests on a basic moral proposition: that all human beings have real, equal, and inherent value—simply by virtue of their humanity—that their rulers neither give them nor can take away.

Because all human beings have value, a just government must draw its authority from their consent. Democracies therefore choose their rulers through regular elections, with universal suffrage, in which all members of the polity have a meaningful opportunity to participate.



Elections alone, however, are not sufficient; democracies must also respect political and civil liberties. Democratic systems always recognize restrictions on the state's power to take the life, liberty, and property of the people and to intrude on people's lives. In democracies, the law constrains the rulers as well as the ruled, and individual people can vindicate their rights against the state, through processes enforced by an independent judiciary.

There is no democratic model that will suit all nations. Because democracy is at heart rule by the people,

and because different peoples have different temperaments and histories, democratic political structures should and do vary widely around the world.

Some democracies have strict separation of powers; others do not. Some have strong federal traditions; others centralize government authority. Some have particularly powerful executives; some have strong traditions of vigorous judicial power. Some especially protect certain areas of individual conscience; others allow somewhat greater state regulation of those areas.

For the same reasons, there is also a wide variance in the policies of different democracies. They tax their citizens in different ways and at different levels; they have differing models of education, health care, welfare, and criminal and civil justice. They prioritize issues and equities differently, according to the needs and inclinations of their voters.

There are no perfect people, and there is no perfect government. Democratic leaders can be incompetent and, sometimes, corrupt. Democratic governments can and have violated the rights of individuals, and sometimes of whole racial, ethnic, or religious groups. But democracy also provides a remedy: the peaceful reform of unjust policies and the removal of failed or corrupt leaders through constitutional means.

The history of the democratic age—roughly the past 300 years—shows the enduring strength and wisdom of the democratic idea. Over time democracies govern more effectively than authoritarians who believe they have the right to rule by oppression rather than consent.

But even if that were not true—even if democracy did not always produce better government—it would still be a preferable form of government because it respects the value of people. That is why we believe democracy is worth sustaining where it does exist and worth promoting in those parts of the world that do not yet enjoy its benefits.

## DEMOCRACY AT HOME

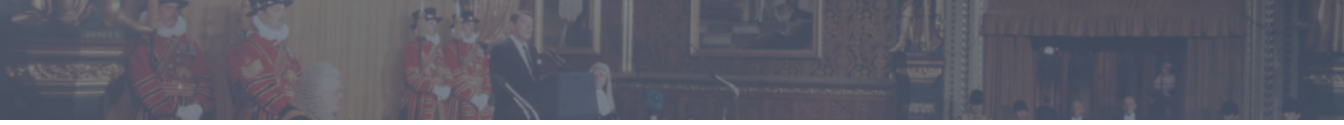
The Working Group recognizes that the mission of expanding freedom worldwide will be most successful if we continually maintain and strengthen our own democratic system. Doing so will enable our country to better resist malign influence efforts and be resilient against campaigns to interfere in our democratic processes and sow discontent and spread disinformation.



Strong democracies are committed to reconciling their differences peacefully and civilly—and they have the culture and institutions in place to do so. Civics education is key to strengthening the health of our democracy. Schools should have a robust curriculum around understanding how democracy and its institutions function as well as the value of our system compared to other models. Despite our imperfections, strengthening and defending our institutions and processes can serve as an example to other nations that we remain steadfast in pursuit of the ideals on which our nation was founded.

While democracy often appears—and sometimes is—complicated and chaotic, ultimately the pluralism and diversity of views proves to be a source of strength and durability. Our belief in this system of government means that we are unafraid to admit to and confront shortcomings and constantly seek to refine our institutions and processes to safeguard individual liberties.

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As we work on our own democracy at home, our nation must not turn away from the task of helping others secure their own freedom. As the late Washington Post reporter and editor Fred Hiatt said so eloquently in 2004, “If you could ask the dissidents and human rights champions who over the decades, in isolated prison cells and frozen work camps, have somehow gotten word that U.S. diplomats or presidents had not forgotten them; if you could ask the elected leader of Burma, who is still under house arrest, or the peasants who are being chased from their villages in western Sudan, or the democrats being slowly squashed in Hong Kong by the Communists in Beijing—if you could ask any of them. They might tell you that the United States has never been perfect, has never done enough, has never been free of hypocrisy—but also that if America cannot take up their cause, no one will.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, America has never been a perfect nation. From our founding sin of slavery through the historical and ongoing struggles to achieve true equality for all citizens, our greatness comes not from perfection but from pursuit. American exceptionalism is born of our striving to become a more perfect union. Even as we do that work, we owe it to oppressed citizens of the world to be the beacon of freedom they want and need. Even in our imperfections, we ought to strive to be what President Reagan called the shining city on a hill.

## ANALYZING THE CURRENT SITUATION

### UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL AUTHORITARIAN THREAT

Thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 21st century’s authoritarian powers pose a renewed threat to the advancement of freedom and democracy. The free world again faces an existential threat from dictators intent not only on repressing their own people but also on threatening democratic nations and buttressing like-minded autocratic regimes. Transnational repression means that individuals in countries near and far are not safe. A failure to push back against efforts from China and Russia to reshape the world in their authoritarian image leaves the free world vulnerable and risks the health of our own democratic systems.

Authoritarian leaders employ harsh means of controlling their populations and leverage 21st-century technologies to do so more effectively than during the Cold War. Both Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping are in many ways leaders of a network of dictators who are intolerant of domestic opposition, along with individuals and organizations operating independently of the state. They crack down especially hard on dissenters and repress civil and political rights in increasingly severe ways. A host of homegrown autocrats join this work in such diverse places as Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, Myanmar (Burma), Nicaragua, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkmenistan, and Uganda.<sup>2</sup> These leaders and regimes seek to strangle independent voices, democratic activism, and even free thought.

While the Berlin Wall was a visible reminder of the divide between the free world and the oppressive rule behind the Iron Curtain, today’s authoritarian nations employ less visible but equally tyrannical and dangerous means of control—empowered by big data and 21st-century technologies like artificial intelligence and facial recognition. In the face of these tactics of oppression, President Reagan’s 1982 observation that “democracy’s enemies have refined their instruments of repression” seems even more relevant 40 years later, as authoritarian



leaders adapt and leverage technology to more effectively control, surveil, and repress their populations.

Beyond the repressive control they exact on their own populations, a number of authoritarian countries—but particularly Russia and China—strive to legitimize authoritarianism, expand its reach, and challenge democratic systems. They do so by shoring up and bolstering other autocratic regimes; China provides economic aid and diplomatic cover to North Korea, Russia props up Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus and the embattled Syrian regime; and Venezuela gives Cuba economic support. They also attack both established and fragile democracies, especially using disinformation and illicit influence campaigns. While this is often about exporting ideology, it is sometimes more a matter of perceived personal power and national prestige—or creating openings for manipulation.

As we have seen both during the Cold War and in the present, dictators not only harm their own populations but also imperil other nations. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine demonstrates that repressive regimes are willing to use violence against both their own people and citizens in other countries. The Russian government has also employed disinformation attempts to justify its invasion of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> One reason it represses domestic dissidents is to silence these brave citizens who not only condemn their governments’ use of domestic aggression but also challenge their foreign ambitions to extend their control beyond existing borders. For example, even from jail, opposition leader Alexei Navalny has called for Russian citizens to protest the attack on Ukraine.<sup>4</sup>

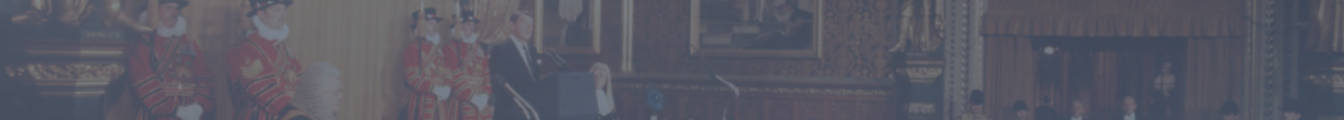
Another weapon in the arsenal of authoritarian nations is collaborating on aggressive efforts to share tactics of repression with other nations, exporting technologies that enable dictators to strengthen their grip on power. While many of these autocrats have already sought to amass power and expand their authoritarian reach, they welcome assistance in augmenting their ability to do so. This sharing of “worst practices” has taken the form of training programs whose curriculum includes tools to control public opinion, mass surveillance tactics, internet control measures, and censoring methods. For example, China has organized and hosted training programs for foreign government officials, where participants from the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand have attended sessions to learn their repressive governance toolkit.<sup>5</sup> These practices

echo the Soviet Union’s Cold War-era covert political training and assistance to Marxist-Leninists in other countries—but they are far from covert.



Other nations appear to learn from and borrow tactics from Russia and China on their own. Kyrgyzstan has used legislation that mirrors Russia’s “Foreign Agents” law. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a regional organization (of which Russia and China are both members along with India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) that serves as a vehicle

to coordinate rights violations, including the refoulement of political refugees and transnational cooperation to arrest political dissidents in each other’s countries.<sup>6</sup>



Beyond this cooperative arrangement, China and Russia also directly export repressive technology. China has exported technologies and tools for mass surveillance, such as surveillance cameras, artificial intelligence, and facial recognition software, to more than 60 other countries, including the UAE, Ecuador, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe—even subsidizing the purchases for countries receiving loans through the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>7</sup> Chinese firms supplying this technology globally are Hikvision, CloudWalk, ZTE, and Huawei—with Huawei alone providing at least 50 nations with artificial intelligence surveillance capabilities.<sup>8</sup> While China has become the primary supplier of extensive surveillance systems, Russian digital disinformation tools and digital authoritarian tools are also gaining ground. Russian firms have sold surveillance-enabled technology to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Russia and China are both among the suppliers of key parts of Myanmar’s surveillance state, which cracked down on protestors following the 2021 military coup.<sup>9</sup> (It is worth noting that democracies are not blameless in this work, with countries like Israel selling technologies, such as Pegasus, that have helped authoritarians track and suppress internal dissent.)

Russia and China have also leveraged civil research and development for their military ambitions. China’s military-civil fusion strategy seeks to eliminate all barriers between the commercial and military sectors, in crucial areas of technology such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, big data, semiconductors, 5G, and advanced nuclear technology.<sup>10</sup> The Russian National Guard uses the guise of counterterrorism to procure technology and equipment that is then leveraged to control internal security threats.<sup>11</sup>

Autocratic leaders have paired these efforts with an assault on democratic norms in international organizations and the use of false narratives to discredit democracy globally. By flooding these venues with propaganda and falsehoods, they whitewash their own failings and drown out the truth with disinformation. Russia and China have capitalized on the COVID-19 pandemic to take aim at democracies by criticizing their ability to contain the virus and presenting their own models as preferable. Although Russia and China are the main instigators of these efforts, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela have joined them in launching assaults on global democratic norms. Repressive rulers have sought to hijack the UN Human Rights Council, which should be the world’s leading global body for promotion of human rights, to instead inject their own counternarratives, introduce authoritarian norms that erode rights protections, shelter their cronies from scrutiny, and use resolutions to endorse their regressive ideas.<sup>12</sup>

Xi and Putin have also launched a “sharp power” assault on democratic countries and attempted to wreak havoc and foment mistrust by sowing disinformation, engaging in aggressive influence campaigns (especially during elections), and using hacking to harm the functioning of democratic institutions. These attacks and the ways that autocrats have sought to take advantage of the openness of democratic systems are reminders that we must be attentive to the vulnerability of fragile democracies to prevent backsliding and help new democracies solidify the kinds of processes and institutions that are an inherent part of systems that respect the will of the people. But attempts to harm democratic systems are not only “sharp;” the Kremlin has sent allegedly private military groups to more than two dozen countries in a bid to extend its global influence.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the authoritarian goal is not just to spread autocracy or expand influence and control but also to undermine democracy itself. By challenging the systems and institutions that underpin free societies, they seek to weaken freedom. And by attacking freedom and democracy, they seek to shake the foundations on which our system is built.

## EVALUATING EXISTING EFFORTS

President Reagan's 1982 Westminster address led to or inspired the creation of much of America's current democracy promotion infrastructure and the corresponding tools to advance freedom around the world. These organizations and actors have made countless contributions in answering President Reagan's charge and have adapted to new challenges. The rationale for these existing efforts remain as strong as ever. Yet we have an opportunity to expand, reimagine and modernize this infrastructure. The strengths that the various organizations and actors bring to this mission demonstrate that partnerships among government, civil society, the private sector, and the international democracy architecture are the key to a holistic approach to expanding freedom around the world in response to efforts by authoritarian regimes to consolidate their power and export their technologically-enabled authoritarian model and undermine global democracy.

### Civil Society

In response to President Reagan's Westminster address, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was established in 1983 as an independent, nonprofit grant-making foundation to encourage the development of democratic institutions, processes, and values. Since its founding, NED's grants have helped foster the growth of political parties, trade unions, free markets and business organizations, civil society organizations, and an independent media—the building blocks of political systems that guarantee freedom, safeguard human rights, realize democratic principles, and abide by the rule of law. NED's annual congressional appropriation enables roughly 1,600 grants each year that reach more than 90 countries.



Along with NED, four non-governmental organizations were established as core institutes of the Endowment, including the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS), the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). IRI and NDI, which are loosely affiliated with the two major American political parties, often focus on legislative capacity-building and training, election monitoring, and strengthening po-

litical parties and processes. Because labor and the private sector were considered other essential components of America's democratic system, ACILS, which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO, advances workers' rights around the world, and CIPE, which is affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, promotes free enterprise and market reform. Many of NED's grants have been implemented through these organizations. Unlike the NED itself, the four core institutes are operational in that they directly carry out programs, most often from country offices, and have become global partners with governments, intergovernmental organizations, and networks of political parties, parliaments, and civil society organizations.



Scores of other civil society organizations, including Freedom House, the American Bar Association, Internews, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, as well as universities, have received U.S. government funding for projects to promote individual liberty, democracy, and the rule of law around the world.

## U.S. Government

The U.S. government itself has used both policies and programs to support democracy promotion globally with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. State Department administering grant-making to mission-driven NGO partners. Unlike the State Department, USAID, in a more controversial move, has channeled government funding to aid democracy through so-called contracts, primarily given to for-profit companies rather than to NGOs whose explicit mission is to advance democracy and fundamental freedoms. The global growth of democracy aid and assistance, including among European governments and entities, fueled congressional willingness to provide increased funding and informed executive branch efforts. Although USAID is primarily focused on humanitarian assistance and economic development, “democracy and governance” emerged as a key pillar of development strategies in the 1990s. This was largely a reflection of democracy promotion becoming a key U.S. foreign policy objective and growing recognition of the links between economic and political development.

During this period, political reform and democratic governance emerged as new development priorities as it became evident that traditional economic assistance alone could not achieve sustained economic growth. Political systems that lacked accountability mechanisms or sufficient political and social inclusion were plagued by corruption or conflict, both of which undermined the objectives of economic development aid to achieve self-sustaining growth and poverty reduction. Even the United Nations Development Programme asserted in its landmark 2002 human development report that democratic participation is a critical result of human development—as well as a means of achieving it.<sup>14</sup>

Development policy also shifted to respond to growing local demands for political voice and democratic change. Increased travel, trade patterns, and the communications revolution conspired to create interest for systems permitting more freedom of choice. The desire for improved economic opportunities coexists with the desire for greater political voice; in an interdependent world, citizens will not indefinitely postpone the latter for the former. Public opinion polls in every region of the world indeed show that people overwhelmingly prefer to live in countries that are democratic.

Under the George W. Bush administration, with the active support of senior State Department officials, the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), which was established in the Jimmy Carter administration, began to focus on grant-making to complement its diplomatic efforts to protect human rights globally. DRL primarily disburses these grants through a competitive application process that calls for non-governmental organizations to submit their ideas through proposals for funding. In the last decade, DRL has developed rapid response and emergency assistance programs to aid embattled human rights defenders and civil society organizations around the world by providing direct financial support, even covering legal or medical fees for those under severe state pressure and persecution.

This pluralism in federally funded democracy assistance has served the United States well, allowing for diverse yet complementary programming that, over the long term, could not be sustained by a static and centralized system.



## Private Sector

Decades ago, many hoped that the expansion and presence of American companies overseas would advance political liberalization. As U.S. companies outsourced manufacturing operations that introduced labor rights in places like China and developed corporate social responsibility policies with a global focus, it was expected that the private sector could serve as an ambassador for rights and freedoms around the world. Next, the rise of the internet and other technological innovations brought optimism that these tools would serve as liberalizing forces, enhancing freedom of expression and freedom of information around the world. Unfortunately, authoritarian governments proved swift in their efforts to blunt these tools in service of freedom and to use them to advance state propaganda and assert greater control over society.

Regrettably, many technology companies proved to be damaging to democracy. As social media became a breeding ground for misinformation and disinformation online, fostering division and polarization, the platforms laid the groundwork for real-life violence and oppression.<sup>15</sup> Other technology companies caved to intimidation tactics of dictators at the expense of those pushing for greater democracy and transparency.<sup>16</sup> In response to threats of prosecution of employees in advance of Russian elections in 2021, Google and Apple removed an app designed to coordinate protest voting.<sup>17</sup> Amidst data privacy concerns, calls for greater regulation abound. As activist Wael Ghonim, whose Facebook posts helped spark the 2011 Arab Spring in Egypt, has said, “While once social media was seen as a liberating means to speak truth to power, now the issue is how to speak truth to social media.”<sup>18</sup>

Several technology companies are now responding with initiatives to advance freedom globally as well as efforts to protect America’s democratic system. For example, Microsoft initiated a Defending Democracy Program to work with stakeholders including governments, non-governmental organizations, academics, and industry in democratic countries to guard against hacking, increase the transparency of online political advertising, explore technological solutions to preserve and protect electoral processes, and defend against disinformation campaigns. Google’s Alphabet launched Jigsaw as a diplomatic arm to expand access to information for the world’s most vulnerable populations and to defend against the world’s most challenging security threats. These companies can further these efforts by uniting around core principles of consumer privacy protections and freedom from the intrusions of government. They will be stronger in resisting and countering challenges from dictators by working together.

Corporate actors need not have selfless ambitions to help advance freedom around the world—though it never hurts. Authoritarianism’s threat to the emergence of a healthy, independent private sector underscores the linkage between freedom and prosperity. Democratic norms like rule of law, transparency, and property rights provide valuable stability and predictability to businesses.

Under Xi, Chinese government control has constrained business operations, but even more alarming, the CCP has detained, arrested, or sentenced on spurious charges numerous business leaders. The experience of Jack Ma, who was “disappeared” in late 2020, shows the dangers of an intrusive state to successful business leaders. The scuttled IPO of his Ant Group was surely retaliation for Ma’s outspokenness against the Chinese regime.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Chinese business tycoon Sun Dawu, who was arrested in 2021, faces a swatch of charges, yet his real crime appears to be failing to toe the government line.<sup>20</sup> Small businesses also feel the pressure to appease the state and not cross redlines, even inadvertently. As a Chinese small business owner stated, “We have no choice but to follow the party.”<sup>21</sup> Xi has also misappropriated the mantle of combatting corruption to incarcerate entrepreneurs and those

who have accumulated what he deems to be too much wealth.

In Russia, the technology sector is under pressure as Putin seeks to establish control over internet and search companies as part of his strategy to nationalize the tech sector and restrict foreign ownership of Russian technology companies. These developments underscore that the task of advancing freedom in the world should not be one that the American government pursues alone and that the private sector has a unique role to play.

## International Architecture

In 1982, there were relatively few international efforts to protect or advance democracy, aside from the work of the German Stiftung, or political party foundations, which played an important role in supporting the political transitions of Spain and Portugal in the 1970s. Since then, global groups dedicated to this effort have proliferated, forming an international democratic architecture. This architecture, or ecosystem, which has formed at both the regional and international levels, has grown to include intergovernmental organizations that are organized around democratic principles or have adopted democratic charters, interparliamentary groups, civic and political party networks and party foundations, governments and their aid agencies, coalitions of election management bodies, and nongovernmental organizations that operate in a similar fashion as the NED.

## MODERNIZING THE TOOLKIT

In the years since President Reagan's 1982 Westminster address, the U.S. efforts across government, civil society, and the private sector have contributed to an expansion of freedom and democracy. Many of the strategies the United States developed and employed not only remain salient but form a strong foundation for continued efforts. Yet as key authoritarian states have modernized their means of solidifying control and propagating their state-centered governance systems, the United States and its democratic partners must also expand and update their toolkit. We must respond to authoritarian leaders' steps to take a more muscular posture, including their concerted assault on global democracy.

As we modernize our tools, we can target the weaknesses and bankruptcy of authoritarian political control, such as their failure to deliver sustained, inclusive economic growth, the domestic resentment that kleptocracy generates, and the underlying frailty of systems that rely on oppression to survive. At the same time, we should demonstrate the contrast with democratic systems—both the freedom they provide and the ability to deliver on governance, provide transparency, and promote prosperity. The rise of transnational repression reflects the fact that authoritarian rulers fear not only the rise of freedom and democracy inside their nations but also outside their borders.

The recommendations below are geared toward looking proactively for new opportunities instead of simply reacting to challenges. Rather than minor refinements, the Working Group seeks to focus on broader strategic ideas.

## LEVERAGING NEW TECHNOLOGIES TO ADVANCE FREEDOM

Authoritarian leaders have weaponized technological innovations to strengthen their surveillance and repression of their own people, and they have used technology to attack free

nations, foment uncertainty and mistrust through disinformation campaigns aimed at frustrating democratic processes in other countries. Technology has become part of Russia and China's "sharp power" arsenal, which they use to weaken the growth of democracy globally and prevent their citizens from accessing unfiltered news and information. Rather than merely acting to blunt the potential liberalizing force of an open internet, authoritarian countries, especially China, have employed technology as an instrument through which they maintain their stranglehold on power.



Digital authoritarianism, including surveillance of calls, communications, and online activity, allows for such pervasive control that autocrats can thwart challenges to their rule before democratic activists are able to coalesce and organize. Saudi Arabia used Israeli-built spyware Pegasus to enable security officials to surveil Jamal Khashoggi and plot his murder.<sup>22</sup> Because individuals seeking to use technology for freedom often do so at great personal risk, it is important that governments and companies do what they can

to ensure these activities and communications are protected, including through strong privacy and encryption measures.

A central task will be reclaiming the promise and potential of technology as activists around the world have sought to do. We must remember that in 2011, Egyptian activists—and later their counterparts across the region—used social media as a tool to galvanize protests that fueled the Arab Spring uprising, which led to the ousting of several authoritarian leaders.<sup>23</sup> Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny's use of YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter to expose official corruption demonstrates the power of social media to build popular support for dissidents. Average Ukrainians and President Zelenskyy have used social media to show the world the horrors of Russia's invasion and the bravery of the Ukrainian people.

The February 2021 Clubhouse meeting that brought together Han Chinese, Taiwanese citizens, Hong Kong residents, and exiled Uyghurs, is another powerful example of the liberalizing force of a free internet. The forum allowed discussion of the Chinese government detention camps, where it is estimated that more than one million Uyghurs have been held. Although Beijing and other repressive governments have clamped down on Clubhouse, this underscores the widespread desire to have a haven for free speech, to gain access to unfiltered news, and to exchange views without being censored.

Technology also holds promise as a tool to promote good governance and service delivery. The emergence of Code for All groups in dozens of countries shows the potential applications and collaboration that technology can support. Another example is Signal, the end-to-end encrypted app that has provided democracy activists with a secure way to communicate, developed with funding from the Open Technology Fund, an initiative funded by the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

Despite the challenges, emerging technologies should be viewed as a cornerstone of the solu-

tion to countering authoritarianism and giving power back to individual citizens. These tools might also provide part of the solution to disabling disinformation efforts. As the Biden administration's interception of intelligence and reports of Putin's false flag operations demonstrates, technology can be used to preempt, counter, and disarm these kinds of nefarious efforts. But for the promise of technology to be harnessed for good, stakeholders will need to come together to reclaim a more proactive role that takes advantage of the disruptive power of technology.

### Recommendation 1: Develop targeted technology tools

To arm and equip citizens seeking to secure freedom and individual liberties with the digital weapons they need to organize and communicate to overcome surveillance, repression and control in closed countries, the United States should devote dedicated resources to identify critical needs and developing corresponding technology. The U.S. Congress can spearhead this process by creating a special appropriation and directing U.S. federal agencies to develop internal expertise and a grant-making vehicle specifically dedicated to create and develop the kind of technological tools that democracy activists around the world need. Some of these funds could be directed toward the Open Technology Fund with the explicit purpose of developing cutting-edge technology to aid those fighting for freedom in closed societies. American implementing partners and the private sector can also play a role in helping to bring together technological specialists as well as democracy activists. This effort would focus on the potential for digital technology to disrupt authoritarianism's hold.

## DELIVERING RESOURCES TO INDEPENDENT VOICES AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS IN REPRESSIVE SOCIETIES

One of the ways autocrats retain their hold on power is by silencing and oppressing civil society leaders and independent journalists who seek to challenge monopolistic state control and bring government abuses to light. Autocrats have also sought to choke off financial support, valuable international interactions, and contacts with the outside world. Putin has not only used a foreign agents law designed to cut off foreign funding to Russian NGOs but has also more broadly launched a crackdown on civil society.<sup>24</sup> In a similar vein, China has used its Foreign NGO Law to restrict the kinds of support and interactions Chinese civil society can have with their foreign counterparts.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, independent domestic media in closed societies face severe repression, including persecution, violence, and prosecution on trumped up charges. Reporters without borders estimates that 488 journalists are facing arbitrary detention.<sup>26</sup> Aside from these threats to their life and liberty, many of them face threats to their livelihood with the risk of defamation charges.<sup>27</sup>

To confront this, the free world needs to find creative solutions to bring new resources to democratic activists so that even in closed societies they have access to funding, training, ideas, and expertise as they endeavor to free their countries from the grip of dictators. By doing so, the democratic nations and the people who are fortunate enough to live within those open societies could not only inject needed tangible support but also offer much needed moral support to these actors.



## Recommendation 2: Launch an International Platform for Freedom

To provide civil society struggling under autocratic rule with needed resources, the U.S. and its democratic partners should work together to develop a disruptive web-based platform to match those seeking democracy assistance (including funding, equipment, infrastructure, and legal assistance), with those seeking to provide support, including concerned individuals as well as institutional donors.

The platform could be set up so that those featured on it are vetted and secure means of delivering support to them are established. This International Platform for Freedom could enable citizens in free countries to support reformers in authoritarian societies and could be searchable by country or topic, such as countering disinformation or expanding the rights of women. Activists eligible for support could include those in repressive countries and those who continue their work from exile and endeavor to bring international attention to the conditions in their home countries.

While the United States with its vibrant civil society organizations and creative private technology sector has a unique role to play in fostering this endeavor, it must not be solely an American effort. It should be an international one in which we cooperate with democratic allies and call on citizens in other free countries to contribute. This effort could leverage U.S. government, civil society, and private sector resources and bring these sectors together to create a digital platform that could empower groups, activists, and journalists in need of support.

## STRENGTHENING SYNERGIES BETWEEN COMBATING CORRUPTION AND DEMOCRATIZATION EFFORTS



Corruption not only plunders public resources but also personally enriches autocrats and often funds their illegitimate hold on power. It undermines economic freedom and the power of the market through distortions that harm sustainable long-term development. The lack of checks and balances and the absence of any meaningful restraints on government power mean that authoritarian systems are rife for abuse by political leaders, allowing them to enrich themselves, their families, and their cronies. Russia and

China increasingly resemble kleptocracies where the political elite use their power and influence for financial gain. And that kleptocracy has helped fill Putin's war chest, enabling Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

This is, however, a vulnerability that that can be exploited to strengthen the case for democratization among populations that resent this misuse of state resources. For example, in China, a Pew poll found that 84 percent of Chinese citizens saw corrupt officials as a “big problem.”<sup>28</sup> Further, the Reagan Institute’s analysis of the Global Corruption Index and the Freedom House Global Freedom index found a strong correlation between freedom and corruption.<sup>29</sup> Venezuela, which was fifth from the bottom on the corruption index, is enveloped in widespread corruption and organized crime.<sup>30</sup> While the politically well-connected purchase overseas homes, ordinary Venezuelans suffer from shortages of basic food and supplies.

Russian citizens have made the link between authoritarian rule and corruption. During April 2021 demonstrations in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, protestors chanted, “Putin is a thief,” and, “freedom to political prisoners.”<sup>31</sup> In Malaysia, Prime Minister Najib Razak cracked down on independent media and civil society to thwart efforts to hold him accountable for the billions siphoned from Malaysia’s 1MDB sovereign wealth fund.<sup>32</sup>

### Recommendation 3: Underscore connection between anti-corruption and democratization efforts

People living under corrupt authoritarian rule can better fight dictators and corruption if armed with the right tools. To address this, organizations implementing democracy projects and the donors supporting these initiatives should incorporate combatting corruption as part of their programs. They should focus on means to hold corrupt leaders accountable, including through advancing government transparency, training journalists in investigative tactics, and calling for monitoring mechanisms, such as disclosure requirements and civil society watchdog efforts.

President Biden’s anti-corruption strategy could further embrace this approach and expand on potential synergies between combating corruption and advancing democracy at the same time. This approach would strengthen anti-corruption efforts by getting at one of the root causes of corruption—unchecked authoritarian rule that leads to abuses of power—and would thus inject fresh energy into fighting corruption. Moreover, establishing this connection is a powerful way to enhance the appeal of democracy to people around the world, since the concept of freedom is foreign or undefined to many people.

## INVIGORATING INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

Recognizing the potential power of an independent media, autocrats have consistently attacked freedom of the press and successfully blunted the role of independent journalists. For example, in the days leading up to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, his regime moved to close the last independent media outlets to deprive the public of access to accurate accounts of the war.

Increasingly, dictators also seek to infringe on freedom of expression overseas. Russia and China manipulate media to propagate their narratives and engage in information warfare and outspend American efforts to support independent news. Russia’s international television broadcaster RT has fabricated news stories, misrepresented interviewees, and used fake experts.<sup>33</sup> In Africa, China has invested heavily in the media sector to ensure that journalists “tell China’s story well.”<sup>34</sup>

An independent media sector can serve as a watchdog over government abuse, galvanize public opinion, and present key tenets of democratic systems to publics around the world. Nurturing independent media and journalism and supporting media literacy programs is



also a way to guard against nefarious disinformation campaigns. As COVID-19 was unfolding, investigative journalists provided some of the most damning accounts of China's handling of the pandemic.<sup>35</sup> Caixin, known for investigative stories on Chinese politics, questioned the government's official death count in Wuhan.

Independent media, especially print media, faces economic pressures in many countries—but in particular in non-democratic countries where the government can intimidate poten-

tial advertisers, choke off access to needed equipment, enact laws to cut off outside support, and target reporters with violence. According to Reporters Without Borders, in 2020, 50 journalists were killed worldwide; 84 percent of them were deliberately murdered.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, in addition to continuing programs of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, such as Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Voice of America, part of the solution will need to focus on using flexible and creative means of delivering support, such as training in investigative skills, learning to use sources to monitor the exports of surveillance technology, and using social media to reach the broader public. The United States must also remain committed to diplomatic and policy tools that defend the independence of journalists and technologies that keep both traditional and social media up and running.

#### **Recommendation 4: Inject additional resources and create a new grant-making entity to support independent media and journalism**

To increase the potential of independent media and investigative journalism to expand freedom in closed societies, Congress should devote greater resources to the U.S.-funded international broadcast networks, ensure their independence from political influence by modernizing the International Broadcasting Act, and authorize and fund a grant-making entity that would receive a congressional appropriation while remaining separate and independent from the U.S. government. This effort would augment and bolster the mission of the networks funded by the U.S. Agency for Global Media and the International Fund for Public Interest Media, which is co-chaired by Nobel Prize winner Maria Ressa, as well as support independent media that are being shut down or bankrupted due to legal issues or government pressure on advertisers.

The United States can also use these additional resources to support not just U.S. government funded media programs but also journalists working for privately financed media outlets who also face pressure, harassment, and spurious

lawsuits aimed at silencing them. While current programs remain invaluable, updating the means of supporting them and bringing cohesion to these efforts would ensure continued delivery of objective news in closed countries. Many current programs rely on reporting provided by citizens in other countries and therefore require the means to continue building local capacity.

## EMPOWERING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Authoritarian learning, collaboration among repressive countries, and transnational repression demand a coordinated response from nations and other stakeholders committed to protecting and expanding free societies around the world. President Reagan's outreach to our democratic allies when he delivered the Westminster address is a reminder that the United States must build bridges with other actors and foster cooperation among business, government, and civil society groups. There is much untapped political and economic potential; the United States and its democratic allies account for 60 percent of global GDP, and several other countries could be partners in a broader effort to stimulate international cooperation.

President Biden's Global Summit for Democracy held in December 2021 is a starting point, but we need to continue bringing together nations committed to democracy under a more sustained and comprehensive international strategy. This could mean, for example, encouraging the OECD and its member states to elevate democracy promotion efforts and funding. A similar initiative could promote deeper engagement between the United States and the European Union. In addition, we should look beyond reviving intergovernmental cooperation and seek ways to deepen our engagement through non-governmental cooperation across borders and regions.

### Recommendation 5: Build flexible coalitions around specific pillars of free societies

To broaden the range of partners, the United States should encourage states that are not often involved in these efforts to take a leading role. Emerging middle power democracies, even those with flaws in their domestic democratic institutions, can demonstrate a commitment to shared principles in their foreign policy. As a way to embrace "microlateralism," smaller nations could be brought together in groups focused on specific issue areas. Diverse participation and leadership might also mean not relying solely on the executive branches of various governments and joining forces with parliamentarians and legislators who expose the import of democracy and human rights as an essential part of their nations' foreign policies.<sup>37</sup>

These kinds of specific groupings of nations committed to particular ideals would be more nimble, easier to organize, and flexible enough to allow countries to participate in the issues that speak to their expertise and commitment. For example, some countries might be much more likely to join in efforts related to free elections or rule of law while others may lean toward initiatives on freedom of the press or fighting corruption. The necessity of repelling and countering disinformation campaigns might form the basis of expanded cooperation, particularly since countering disinformation will require a collective response. Such issue-specific groups would also give smaller states opportunities to lead.<sup>38</sup> These coalitions could be more inclusive and attract more countries than an all-encompassing approach.

This broader participation that draws nations from every region of the world alongside America would demonstrate inclusion, underscore the legitimacy of democracy as a global norm, show the universal appeal of individual freedoms, and counter the false argument that America's interest in democracy stems only from geopolitical competition.

## RECOMMITTING TO CORE PRINCIPLES

Even as the United States spearheads these new initiatives, we should not abandon some essential approaches that have guided past efforts. We must remain committed to and even double down on using approaches that have been successful in the past and that reflect our values.

We should also remember that our mission extends beyond helping countries as they choose democracy and begin to transition toward freedom; we must continue to support and nurture the ongoing process of democratic consolidation. To prevent backsliding in new democracies or countries still on the path to establishing mature democratic systems, our support should never end with a nation's first free election. We should continue to support nascent democracies as they build the needed institutions and infrastructure for a truly free society.

A citizen-centered approach is essential to this work because, at their core, democratic governments are intended to deliver governance for the benefit of the public, not just the privileged few. Democracies must respond to the needs of the people by providing services, infrastructure, and public health and safety. This provides the basis for the freedom to live, work, and flourish—and, in turn, builds greater trust in government itself. Responsive, democratic governments enable their citizens to live stable and productive lives, which allows people to flourish. This link between democracy and a responsive state that delivers good and accountable governance is crucial. We should remain committed to ensuring that effective and responsive governance is part of the democracy-building toolkit, especially in new or fragile democracies. The failure to deliver on basic governance in Afghanistan offers a stark reminder of the risks that remain even after substantial investment of blood and treasure.



In 1982, President Reagan spoke of the need to protect diversity, and we must also remain committed to the fundamental principles of tolerance and inclusion. Democratic systems can only be legitimate if they include groups who have been marginalized and persecuted, regardless of identities or affiliations. The U.S. government and civil society groups should empower ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous communities, women, the LGBTQ community, young people, dis-

abled people, and other sidelined groups to advocate for themselves within their political and civic systems. But this cannot be the work of persecuted and minority communities alone; all participants in a democracy should help to protect the rights of marginalized groups—because freedom requires freedom for everyone.

America's leaders also have an important role to play in demonstrating their commitment to the cause of freedom by meeting with democracy activists from around the world. This is a tradition that past presidents have embraced, notably Presidents Reagan, Carter, and Bush. Dissidents regularly point to these meetings as sources of hope and inspiration in the face of harsh persecution and the threat of incarceration for peaceful political activities. U.S. presidents, senior Executive Branch officials, and members of Congress can signal U.S. support by meeting with democracy activists, listening to them talk about their work to combat repression and bring freedom to their fellow citizens, and publicly championing their causes.

Finally, the free world must stand together. The battle for democracy and the sovereignty in Ukraine brings this need into stark relief today. An attack on freedom anywhere is a threat to freedom everywhere. As President Reagan said, "If freedom, democracy, and the rights of man are to be preserved through the ages, free men and women must accept the responsibilities that go with their freedoms."

## CONCLUSION

Under President Reagan, the United States championed a new mission—one that aimed to advance freedom around the world. We should read the history of this endeavor with clear eyes, seeing that it succeeded in creating new institutions and building understanding about how to nurture democracy and aid those on the front lines of that battle. Yet in the face of the growing specter of transnational oppression and evidence of a global democracy recession, the United States has an opportunity to reinvigorate, strengthen, and modernize our approaches and expand our efforts.

President Reagan's confident approach, our nation's deep bipartisan legacy of commitment to democracy, and the enduring value of freedom should guide our efforts. We should channel the historical spirit of this work but also seek to modernize our toolkit for the 21st century. At stake is the freedom of Ukrainians fighting for their nation, the future of the Hong Kong protestors pushing back against China's control, and the destiny of all people working toward more just and free societies today and tomorrow. This mission has the promise to free people from human suffering and create the conditions for human flourishing.

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“ While we must be cautious about forcing the pace of change, we must not hesitate to declare our ultimate objectives and to take *concrete actions* to move toward them. We must be *staunch in our conviction* that ***freedom*** is not the **sole prerogative** of a lucky few, but the ***inalienable*** and ***universal right*** of all human beings. ”

President Ronald Reagan, June 8, 1982,  
Address to Members of the British Parliament at Westminster



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